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U.S. Religious Preferences Shift Dramatically in Last 4 Decades

PRINCETON, N.J. — Americans' religious preferences have shifted dramatically over the last four decades.

In 13 Gallup surveys conducted during 1985 with more than 18,000 adults, 57% say they are Protestants, 28% Catholics, 2% Jews, and 2% Mormons. Another 1% claim affiliation with an Eastern Orthodox Church and a like proportion with other churches. The 1985 findings statistically match those recorded since 1981.

In 1947, when Gallup began reporting religious preferences, 69% said they were Protestants, 20% Catholics, and 5% Jews. The growth in Catholics has been attributed to such factors as a higher birth rate and the influx of Hispanics.

Details are shown below:

Religious Preferences

	1985 %	1947 %	Point change
Protestant	57	69	−17
Catholic	28	20	+40
Jewish	2	5	−60

One in 11 Has No Religious Preference

One person in 11 (9%) in the 1985 surveys gives no religious preference. This percentage rose gradually between 1972 to 1983 but has levelled off in the last three years.

It should be borne in mind that many of those who state a religious preference may not be formally affiliated with any religious body. Here is the question:

What is your religious preference — Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, or an Orthodox Church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?

Here are the findings for 1985:

Religious Preferences

Protestant	57%
Roman Catholic	28
Jewish	2
Mormon (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)	2
Orthodox Church	1
Other	1
None	9

In the following table, trend data for the Mormon and Orthodox Churches are omitted because of insufficient historical data.

Religious Preferences

	Prot-estant	Cath-olic	Jew-ish	Other	None
	— Yearly —				
	%	%	%	%	%
1985	57	28	2	4	9
1984	57	28	2	4	9
1983	56	29	2	4	9
1982	57	29	2	4	8
1981	59	28	2	4	7
1980	61	28	2	2	7
1979	59	29	2	2	8
1977–78	60	29	2	1	8
1976	61	27	2	4	6
1975	62	27	2	4	6
1974	60	27	2	5	6
	— By 5-year periods —				
1972	63	26	2	4	5
1967	67	25	3	3	2
1962	70	23	3	2	2
1957	66	26	3	1	3
1952	67	25	4	1	2
1947	69	20	5	1	6

NOTE: Results for some years do not add to 100% because of rounding.

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Trend in Protestant Church Preferences

The trend in individual Protestant denominational groupings shows that the Baptist group of churches has changed little since this measurement was started in 1967. Declines, however, have occurred among Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, although there is some evidence that these declines may be levelling out.

Protestant Church Preferences

	Baptist	Methodist	Lutheran	Presbyterian	Episcopalian
	%	%	%	%	%
1985	20	10	6	2	2
1984	20	9	7	2	3
1983	21	10	7	3	2
1982	19	10	6	4	2
1981	19	10	6	4	2
1980	19	10	6	4	2
1979	19	11	6	4	2
1978	19	11	6	4	2
1976	21	11	7	5	3
1975	20	11	7	5	3
1974	21	14	7	6	3
1969	20	14	7	6	3
1967	21	14	7	6	3

The 1985 religious preference figures are based on in-person interviews with 18,439 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation.

AIDS NOT VIEWED AS JUDGMENT FROM GOD

A 55% majority of Americans believe AIDS is *not* a judgment from God upon sexuality. About one in five (21%), however, does hold this belief while another 24% are undecided.

These are among the key findings to emerge from a national survey of 518 adults conducted in December for the Christian Broadcasting Network by The Gallup Organization. Other key findings:

- Forty-one percent think the responses of the Christian communities to AIDS has been adequate or better. But nearly as many, 35%, describe this response as "poor."
- Almost 6 in 10 (57%) express the view that homosexuals can adopt a heterosexual life style, if they wish, while 17% disagree and 26% are undecided.
- Is homosexuality a sin? Half of survey respondents say "yes", 32% "no". Another 18% do not express an opinion.
- Two-thirds of all persons interviewed (67%) think gay bath houses should be closed while 19% hold the opposite view and 14% do not offer an opinion.

ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE IN AMERICA

The clergy of America are on the "front line" of dealing with alcoholism and alcohol abuse in our society. A new 76 page Gallup Report, *Alcohol Use and Abuse in America*, will help you minister to alcoholics and their families by providing answers to such questions as:

- What do Americans know and not know about alcoholism?
- What are their perceptions and misconceptions?
- How many homes are afflicted by alcohol-related problems?
- What steps do people think should be taken to deal with alcoholism and alcohol abuse – and how willing are they, themselves, to further such efforts?

How to Order: Send $65.00 (price for up to 4 copies; 5 or more copies are $45.00 each) to: The Gallup Organization, Inc. Attn: CM, P.O. Box 628, Princeton, New Jersey 08542.

Coming in future issues!

- *How are the non-religious sustain themselves spiritually?*
- *Religion in America:* An Assessment by George Gallup Jr., Executive Director of the Princeton Religion Research Center.
- *How do Catholics think their church will differ in the year 2,000?*
- *What are the levels of charitable activity among the major faiths and denominations?*

PUBLIC REMAINS CLOSELY DIVIDED ON 1973 COURT ABORTION RULING

The U.S. public is evenly divided, 45% to 45%, between those who favor and those who oppose the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that a woman may go to a doctor to end pregnancy at any time during the first three months of pregnancy.

The latest Gallup Poll provides still further evidence that few issues of recent years have so sharply divided Americans. Public opinion also was closely divided in earlier Gallup surveys, although support for the ruling has declined slightly since 1983.

The small changes in opinion that have occurred between surveys are due in considerable measure to the shifting views of men. Women's views today are statistically the same as those recorded in 1983 but among them, support for the Court ruling has fallen by 11 percentage points.

Supreme Court Ruling

The 1973 decision said that the states cannot place restrictions on a woman's right to an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. In the second three months the Court said that the states still have no authority to prevent abortion, but that they can regulate certain of the medical aspects involved. Only during the final three months, when medical experts generally agree that the fetus is capable of living outside the womb, can states impose restrictions on a woman's right to an abortion, the Court ruled.

The following question was asked:

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that a woman may go to a doctor to end pregnancy at any time during the first three months of pregnancy. Do you favor or oppose this ruling?

Here are the latest results and the trend:

1973 COURT RULING

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
1986–Jan. 10–13	45	45	10
1983	50	43	7
1981	45	46	9
1974	47	44	9

Analysis by groups shows men and women now holding similar views and little difference between the opinions of Protestants and Catholics. Furthermore, the views of young adults closely parallel those in the next oldest (30–49) age group, but persons 50 and older tend to oppose the ruling.

Substantial differences are found on the basis of education and Protestant denomination. Six in 10 college graduates, compared to 27% of persons with only a grade school background, favor the Court ruling.

Among Southern Baptists, opposition outweighs support by a 2-to-1 ratio, while the views of Methodists lean in the other direction. Democrats are quite evenly divided on the issue but Republicans are narrowly opposed.

Details are shown below.

1973 COURT RULING

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
NATIONAL	45	45	10
Men	45	43	12
Women	45	46	9
18–29 years	49	41	10
30–49 years	49	44	7
50 & older	38	48	14
College grads.	59	35	6
College inc.	47	43	10
High school grads.	43	47	10
High school inc.	42	46	12
Grade school	27	57	16
Catholics	40	48	12
Protestants – total	42	50	8
Southern Baptists	31	60	9
Methodists	53	40	7
Republicans	42	49	9
Democrats	48	44	8
Independents	45	42	13

The latest results are based on in-person interviews with 1,570 adults, 18 and older, conducted in over 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period Jan. 10–13. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be ±3 percentage points in either direction.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

EVANGELICALS, NON-EVANGELICALS HOLD CONTRASTING IMAGES OF GOD

Evangelicals and non-evangelicals hold sharply contrasting images of God. The former are far more likely than the latter to picture God as Father than as Mother, Master than Spouse, Judge than Lover, Creator than Healer, and Redeemer than Liberator.

As a contribution to the extensive research in religion conducted by the Reverend Andrew M. Greeley and the National Opinion Research Center, the Gallup Organization repeated a question asked by NORC. This question, on images of God, is one of a 4-item measurement that Greeley believes to be "an important predictor variable of attitudes and behaviors."

Survey Question

Here is the question:

There are many different ways of picturing God. We'd like to know the kinds of images you are most likely to associate with God.

Here is a card with sets of contrasting images. On a scale of 1–7 where would you place your image of God between the two contrasting images?

The first set of contrasting images shows Mother at 1 on the scale and Father at 7. If you image God as a Mother you would place yourself at 1. If you image God as a Father, you would place yourself at 7. If you image God as somewhere between Mother and Father, you would place yourself at 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6.

Where would you place your image of God on the scale for

First, the summary findings, which show the weight of response clearly on the side of God as Father, Master, Judge, Creator and Redeemer.

IMAGES OF GOD

	– SCALE POINTS –								No Opin
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		%
Mother	3	1	3	19	7	8	46	Father	13
Master	44	11	6	16	2	1	4	Spouse	16
Judge	35	9	8	20	4	2	7	Lover	15
Friend	24	6	6	24	5	3	18	King	14
Creator	33	6	4	35	2	2	5	Healer	13
Redeemer	37	8	6	25	2	2	4	Liberator	16

Here is a comparison of the results for evangelicals and non-evangelicals:

MOTHER – FATHER

	National	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
	%	%	%
(Mother) 1	3	3	3
2	1	2	2
3	3	1	3
4	19	10	21
5	7	2	8
6	8	6	8
(Father) 7	46	64	42
No opinion	13	12	13

MASTER – SPOUSE

	National	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
	%	%	%
(Master) 1	44	66	39
2	11	9	12
3	6	2	7
4	16	7	18
5	2	1	3
6	1	1	2
(Spouse) 7	4	3	3
No opinion	16	11	16

JUDGE – LOVER

	National	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
	%	%	%
(Judge) 1	35	46	32
2	9	6	10
3	8	2	9
4	20	19	20
5	4	1	5
6	2	1	2
(Lover) 7	7	11	6
No opinion	15	14	16

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FRIEND – KING

	National	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
	%	%	%
(Friend) 1	24	28	23
2	6	4	6
3	6	*	7
4	24	23	24
5	5	5	5
6	3	2	4
(King) 7	18	25	17
No opinion	14	13	14

*Less than one percent

CREATOR – HEALER

	National	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
	%	%	%
(Creator) 1	33	44	30
2	6	3	7
3	4	1	4
4	35	30	36
5	2	3	2
6	2	2	2
(Healer) 7	5	5	6
No opinion	13	12	13

*Less than one percent

REDEEMER – LIBERATOR

	National	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
	%	%	%
(Redeemer) 1	37	58	33
2	8	4	9
3	6	2	7
4	25	17	27
5	2	1	2
6	2	*	2
(Liberator) 7	4	4	4
No opinion	16	14	16

*Less than one percent

Results from the Gallup Poll are based on in-person interviews with 1,509 adults, 18 and older, conducted in over 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period Nov. 9-11, 1984.

Evangelicals (267 in this survey) are defined as those with three basic characteristics: (1) they describe themselves as "born-again Christians" or say they have had a "born-again" experience, (2) they have encouraged other people to believe in Jesus Christ, and (3) they believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. (This is a fairly rigorous definition because some evangelicals do not hold to a literal *interpretation* of the Bible, although they accept the absolute *authority* of the Bible.) The other 1,242 persons interviewed are considered non-evangelicals. For results based on the evangelicals one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 8 percentage points in either direction. For the non-evangelicals the error would be 4 percentage points.

GROWING NUMBER OF CATHOLICS IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Although the level of weekly attendance at Mass among Catholics has changed little over the last decade, the number involved in Bible study, meditation, and other religious activities has grown substantially.

In a 1977 survey conducted for the Catholic Press Association, 23% of Catholics said they had read the Bible within the previous 30 days. In a just-completed Gallup Poll, the figure is 32%, an increase of 9 percentage points.

Furthermore, the percentage who attended Catholic social functions during a 30-day test period is up 12 points, while meditation is up 7 points. A similar gain is recorded in the proportion who attended meetings of Catholic organizations. Gains are also recorded in the percentages of Catholics who have gone to confession, attended prayer meetings, and participated in Catholic action or outreach programs.

In both the 1977 and 1986 surveys, Catholics were handed a card listing 11 activities and asked this question: "*By any chance, have you, yourself, done any of the following within the last 30 days?*"

Here are the comparisons:

CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

	1986	1977	Change from 1977
Meditated	39%	32%	+ 7 pts.
Said (prayed) the Rosary	38	36	+ 2
Attended Catholic social function	33	21	+ 12
Read the Bible	32	23	+ 9
Gone to confession	23	18	+ 5
Attended a meeting of Catholic organization	17	10	+ 7
Attended a prayer meeting	12	8	+ 4
Participated in a Catholic action or outreach program	7	4	+ 3
Made a retreat	4	2	+ 2
Attended a spiritual conference	3	2	+ 1
Attended a marriage encounter session	2	3	– 1

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY

Building a truly effective ministry requires an awareness of the stages of growth in a person's spiritual life, from childhood to old age, as well as an awareness of the impact of "life crises" on faith development.

Not only an awareness but a *response* because failure to minister to people at their current stage of faith development – and to respond appropriately to their spiritual "highs" and "lows" – could result in a serious dropout rate in your church or synagogue.

For centuries it has been assumed that faith is something given, constant, unchanging. Now, however, it is clear that people go through "passages" in their spiritual lives just as they do in other dimensions of their existence. Yet many religious professionals – clergy, counselors, youth leaders, and educators – sometimes appear to be insensitive, in their teaching and program planning, to people's spiritual journeys.

This new publication, FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY, based on a landmark study four years in the making, will guide you in your efforts to respond to the spiritual changes people experience as they move through life. The study was conducted by The Gallup Organization, Inc. for Faith Development in the Adult Age Cycle, a research project of the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada in cooperation with the Center for Religious Education, College of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY not only sheds light on these and other vital questions, but also explores the practical implications of the survey findings for your ministry.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY to be of great help in your work.

HOW TO ORDER

This new publication may be ordered from The Princeton Religion Research Center, Inc. (P.O. Box 310, Princeton, N.J. 08542). The cost is $25 postpaid.

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PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER
P.O. Box 310
53 Bank Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542

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Ms. Jeanne Long
Cong. Info. Serv.
4520 East-West Hwy.
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